

Susan Downey House, Building No. 15  
(Harpers Ferry National Historical Park)  
High Street  
Harpers Ferry  
Jefferson County  
West Virginia

HABS No. WV-23

HABS  
WVA,  
19-HARF,  
9-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS  
WVA  
19-HARF  
9-

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### THE SUSAN DOWNEY HOUSE

HABS No. WV-23

Location High Street, West of the intersection of High and Shenandoah Streets, Harpers Ferry, Jefferson County, West Virginia

Present Owner National Park Service

Present Occupant None

Present Use None

#### Brief Statement of Significance

This building was built in 1838-39 by William Anderson, as a residence, on land which originally was part of the Wager Six Acre Reservation. The Wagers were heirs of Robert Harper. Besides its use as a residence, it has served as a tavern, a store, a boarding house and a rooming house. This building is a good example of the structures of downtown Harpers Ferry during the Civil War. It is situated near the B&O Railroad and the former sites of the U. S. Arsenal and Armory and the Engine House in which John Brown sought refuge in his raid of 1859.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Downey House was erected in 1838-39 by William Anderson. It consisted of the main rectangular building and a kitchen wing to which was added, probably in 1841, a second story of frame construction. In 1844, the first floor of the main part of the building was altered to provide for space for a shop and two back rooms. Other alterations include the addition of a first floor store front at an unknown date,

**SUSAN DOWNEY HOUSE**

High Street, Harpers Ferry

Jefferson County, West Virginia

and the addition of a two story frame porch at the southeast side of the main building at an unknown date. Some of the original rooms were divided and at present there are thirteen rooms in the structure.

In 1846, Anderson sold the house to Susan Downey. She held the property until her death in 1856 and her heirs held the property until 1868, when it was sold.

Prepared by

Charles S. Dotts  
Student Supervisor, HABS Team  
Charles S. Dotts

Date July, 1959

A. W. Franzen  
A. W. Franzen  
Resident Architect, HPMM

Reference: Historic Building Report, by Charles W. Snell, Historian (Park Supervisory), Part I, Project No. HP-4, October 7, 1957, and Part II, Project No. HP-54, March 27, 1959.

SUSAN DOWNEY HOUSE

High Street, Harpers Ferry

Jefferson County, West Virginia

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Susan Downey House is an L-shaped, wall-bearing stone structure of two and a half stories and basement comprising the main part which is rectangular in area, and a kitchen wing which was originally of one story and basement. To this wing was added, probably in 1841, a second story of frame construction. The entire building covers a ground area of 1215 feet.

The walls of the structure are of rough cast native stone and they vary in thickness from 1'-8" to 2'-10". The construction of the building is apparently sound; however, its front, at the south corner, is six inches out of plumb. In addition to the second story that was added to the kitchen wing, other alterations include the addition of a first floor store front to the southwest elevation at an unknown date and the addition of a two-story frame porch at the southeast side of the main part of the building at an unknown date. Also, some of the original rooms were divided and there are now thirteen rooms in the structure.

The original roof covering was slate. This was removed in 1957 by the NPS and replaced by rolled roofing. Slate, however, remains on the sides of the four dormers and the roof of the kitchen wing. The main structure has a roof pitch of 8 to 12 and the kitchen roof has a pitch of 6 to 12.

SUSAN DOWNEY HOUSE

High Street, Harpers Ferry

Jefferson County, West Virginia

The exterior of the building which is mostly of stone was parged at one time. Weathering has removed much of this and the remaining parging is in poor condition. Additional exterior materials include weather boards on the second floor of the kitchen wing. These are in need of paint; otherwise, they are in good condition. Brick is used for the chimneys on the southeast wall of the building and above the ceiling line of the third floor, the bricks are exposed to form two chimneys with a wall between them.

The front entrance is level with the street. The ground then slopes toward the rear of the building and consequently, both the main structure and the kitchen wing basements at the rear are located at ground level.

The windows, doors, and door frames are of wood and are in fair condition. They appear to be the original ones. An interesting part of the store front addition is the use of eight folding wood shutters on each side of the center door and these fold into pockets at the sides of the store front. They are made of 8" boards, 6'-9½" high and are 6'-3" wide when extended. These existing shutters are the only ones on the building although there is evidence of shutter hardware on the rear or northeast elevation.

The basement was originally one large room plus the kitchen. It

SUEAN DOWNEY HOUSE

High Street, Harpers Ferry

Jefferson County, West Virginia

has been divided into two rooms by a T&G partition. The basement walls are unfinished. The wood flooring of the rear room is of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide boards. The front part of the basement has an uneven dirt floor. This is also true of the area way which adjoins the front of the basement and which lies under a board wall joining the street and the first floor entrance.

The first floor of the main residence was originally one large room. This was divided into three rooms, probably in 1841, by Philadelphia partitions. There are four rooms and a hallway on the second floor and two rooms with two dormers each on the third floor.

The interior walls are plastered and are finished in various stages of wallpaper and paint. The plaster and the wall finishes are in poor condition throughout the structure. The floors are of random width boards in fair condition.

Wooden stairs lead from the kitchen basement to the first floor porch on the southeast side of the building. Remains of stone stairs are noted in the front part of the basement which probably led to the outside of the building. These are in poor condition. The stairs between the first and second floor are missing and have been replaced by a temporary ladder. The wooden stairs between the second and third floors remain however, and these, with railings and balusters, appear

**SUSAN DOWNEY HOUSE**

High Street, Harpers Ferry

Jefferson County, West Virginia

to be the original ones.

There are three fireplaces in the basement, three on the first floor and two on the second floor. All of these with the exception of the one in the front room of the first floor have been closed with masonry and wood and some of the mantles are missing.

The Susan Downey House is located on High Street in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, just west of the intersection of Shenandoah and High Streets. It is in the downtown business district near the B&O Railroad and the former sites of the U. S. Arsenal and Armory and John Brown's "Fort" site. The bearing of its long dimension is N 51° E and the building faces southwest.

Prepared by

Charles S. Dotts  
Charles S. Dotts  
Student Supervisor, HABS Team

Date July, 1959

A. W. Fransen  
A. W. Fransen  
Resident Architect, HPNM